

FROM

The African American Alumni Council Celebrates 10 Years



THESE ROOTS

BY LINNIE CARTER '93BS '98MS/MC

A typical 10-year-old is eager to learn, yearning to grow, impressionable yet impressive and on the brink of developing long-term directions. The VCU African American Alumni Council celebrates its 10th anniversary this academic year. We are learning, we are growing, making new connections and moving toward adult responsibilities.

Root and Branch

Bruce Twyman '74BS/MC and the other founders of the Council envisioned an organization that would serve as a rallying point for the concerns of African-American alumni and students. "There was no real representation of our interests and no one to speak for us effectively. We needed to re-establish links between VCU and African-American alumni," explains Twyman, who has just finished his second term as a member of the VCU Alumni Association Board. "We are also looking outward," adds Gail Robinson '82MPA/H&S, the Council's second president, "to increase support for VCU from African-American alumni."

The dream became a reality, and 10 years later, it has become a great deal more. In 1989, the Council counted membership of only 20 to 30 alumni, and the University claimed only 3,519 African-American graduates. In spring of 2000, there are 347 Council members. Since 1989, almost 4,000 more African Americans have graduated from VCU. In 1999-2000, more than 4,330 African-American students found their collegiate home at VCU. These students—past and present—embody the Council's purpose and mission.

More Than Fun and Games

When alumni hear "African American Alumni Council," they immediately think "Reunion Weekend." Surely Reunion festivities are the most popular and visible presence of the Council. At Reunion 2000, the Friday night Annabel Lee cruise drew a sellout crowd of 350 under the stars on the river. The Saturday afternoon cookout brought reminiscing alumni and their families, and the fun culminated with the traditional Saturday evening dance.

But Reunion Weekend is only one of many events and projects the Council sponsors to promote its goals. The Council supports VCU by

- instilling pride among African-American alumni

AFRICAN-AMERICAN IMPACT

VCU's African American alumni have a tremendous impact on our shared world. Here are three of them, as well as a profile of Robert Grey Jr. on page 32. The sidebar lists more—and we've missed hundreds.

"Away from Her Desk"

It took two months to catch up with **Monique Braxton '81BS '84MS/MC**. When the overnight anchor and correspondent for MSNBC is "away from her desk," she's on location around the country and the world.

Her reporting at MSNBC has covered the way the eastern seaboard weathered the "Winter of '98 and the deployment of American fighter pilots to the Persian Gulf during Operation "Desert Fox."

Braxton began her career as the weekend weather reporter for WTVR in Richmond. From 1995 to 1997, Braxton anchored a variety of programs on NewsChannel 8 in Washington, including Smart Women, Daytime Talk, and The Rush Hour Report. In 1996, Braxton garnered an Emmy nomination for her anchoring, and she won the



Best Public Affairs Award for her documentary, "Who We Are: Military." She has also received several civic awards for interviews with national, state, and local officials.

VCU helped prepare Braxton for success. "I learned the basic elements of news, news writing, broadcasting style, editing, breathing techniques, and how to present a story. VCU gave me hands-on experience and on-the-job training."

Her energy and enthusiasm were evident from the beginning as she plunged into student life, enjoying everything from "singing in the Black Awakening Choir, learning to wash my own clothes, and pledging Delta Sigma Theta."

One way she stays connected to "my wonderful sisters" and VCU is through Council events and mentoring. "I find that aspiring young journalists can learn from the experiences that I've had. I've realized that competition is stiff, and sometimes it doesn't matter where you went to school but who you know and how you apply the skills you've gained." To keep learning, she advises, "Go on the vacations and see how your neighbors live. Your way of life isn't the only way to live. Take the time to meet a stranger, fan or colleague."

- inspiring alumni to join and become actively involved in the Council
- serving as a campus advocate for its VCU African-American constituents
- promoting the growth, progress and general welfare of the VCU African-American student body
- contributing to the recruitment and retention of African-American students
- and becoming an important presence in the African-American community.

Building on the leadership of her predecessors, Council President **Michelle McQueen '83BS/B** is a staunch advocate. Everywhere she goes, whatever the occasion, venue or audience, she recruits people to the Council, talking up its activities and accomplishments.

The most important people to any university are its students; their success is the point of the enterprise. For McQueen, "the Council's commitment to VCU's current African-American students is its most significant purpose. There are many ways the AAAC helps to recruit students, makes them feel welcome, and makes sure they stay in school to graduate."

Funding Young Leaders

Two new scholarships for VCU African-American students testify to how much the Council has progressed during the past 10 years.

The first VCU African American Alumni Council Leadership Scholarship, for a student on the Academic Campus who demonstrates leadership, community service and academic success, went to freshman Kina Harding this March. A criminal justice major, Kina says, "One day I am going to be a Supreme Court Judge." She's on her way, with a 4.0 GPA and freshman activities ranging from tutoring kids to vice president of the student chapter of



PHOTOGRAPH BY JERROLD

Sisters in Touch. More than 100 sisters of VCU's Eta Tau Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. celebrated 30 years at VCU, at Reunion 2000. They started the millennium right by donating \$300 to the VCU AAAC Merit Scholarship Fund, a sum VCU matched. It shows, said Michelle Dixon Jones '87BS/H&S, that "we hold true to Delta's founding principles: scholarship, sisterhood and community service."

NAACP, VCU's Student Government Association, Pre-Law Society and the National Society of Black Engineers. —Engineers? "I've always liked math and science, and I wanted to make as many connections as possible."

The Council has raised more than \$11,000 to fund this scholarship. We have begun a second campaign for the VCU African American Alumni Council Merit Scholarship, to be awarded every year to a full-time African-American freshman on the Academic Campus. The scholarship, based on academic achievement, will be renewable for three years if the student remains in good academic standing. The goal is to raise between \$10,000 and \$25,000 by June 30. The University will match the total dollar-for-dollar, up to \$25,000.

Each One, Reach One

The Council's investment in students reaches beyond financial assistance. African Americans in the Class of 2003 met the Council last summer at the freshman cookout sponsored by the VCU Academic Success Center. Over hot dogs and chips in Gladding Residence Hall courtyard, **Eric Williams '96BGS/NTS**, then Council vice president, and Linnie Carter, now incoming Council president, discussed AAAC and its mission, and urged freshmen Rams to join at graduation.

The Council has sponsored career development workshops where VCU students can learn about cooperative education and internship opportunities, electronic resources, and easing

Braxton's whole-hearted approach to life is grounded in a strong faith, born out for her this year. She recently married Shawn Fordham, who is special assistant to the mayor of Philadelphia, where they live. "Life is so short that you must share your unconditional love with family and friends," she says earnestly. "Professionally and personally, this has been a time of remarkable growth."

Big Difference, 0 Disparities

Dr. Regan Crump '78BS/N is a good man in a crisis. Commander Crump, as a member of the U.S. Public Health Service medical team, helped provide patient care in St. Croix after Hurricane Hugo in 1989, and again in 1995, after Hurricane Marilyn. Crump was chief nurse for the PHS disaster medical assistance team and served on the management team in the Virgin Islands.

A 1995 Alumni Star from the School of Nursing, Crump has been in public health for 23 years. Now acting deputy director of the Bureau



of Primary Health for the PHS, he returns soon to directing the Division of Programs for Special Populations.

"I enjoy work that makes a difference on a large scale," Crump says. "I work with community-based organizations, public and private, funding primary health care delivery sites for underserved populations. We provide grants, technical assistance, and many other types of support."

Crump's mother was a nurse, his father a laboratory technician. In nursing Crump says, "I could combine my interest in the sciences with the enjoyment I found in working with people to make a difference.

"I chose MCV because it was a state school, close to my hometown, and a large teaching institution. The impact of being in the city was substantial—it was reality." His work as a nursing student in MCV Hospital's burn unit was "emotionally painful," but invaluable. "I will never forget caring for people with such sudden and extensive physical devastation. It was amazing the way nurses and other staff supported both patients and one another."

In 1993, Crump changed his career focus to large populations and earned his Doctor of Public Health in health policy and management from Johns Hopkins University. Crump's healthy pragmatism zeroes

the transition from classroom to workplace. Many Council members offer internships and networking opportunities for students and recent graduates.

VCU student Thomas Simmons came to last September's Council meeting to thank members for supporting his participation in the Brotherman Retreat. The Council sponsored Simmons

and two other students at the event, a community effort developed by Richmond community leaders and Council members. Encounters and bonding with other African-American men, an inspirational movie, and a presentation from the Richmond NAACP expressed the theme of the spring retreat—Communion and Culture. An enthusiastic Simmons talked about his experience, where "I learned a deeper understanding of the role—and the responsibilities—of African-American men."

McQueen is emphatic that the Council must and will continue to invest in VCU's African-American students. "The most important lesson in life that I learned is that you don't do anything alone," she says. "There is always someone or something that helps you to succeed, and I believe that we as VCU graduates should help those students coming behind us to succeed."



Word. These high school students got some good advice about careers and fine preparation at VCU when AAAC members did a community service recruiting project Reunion Weekend, 2000.

"Partnership for the Future"

The Council theme for 1999-2000 is "Partnership for the Future," and the Council has been cultivating relationships with University divisions that share its passion and mission.

For two years, the Council has joined VCU's African American Studies Program for "Black History in the Making." The February celebration honors high-achieving African-American students, faculty and alumni—like this year's Outstanding African American Alumna, J.B. Bryan, profiled in this issue.

The Council has participated in the Office of Multicultural Student Affairs' Minority Graduation Ceremony for two years. This, too, is a chance for the Council to educate new alumni about the benefits—and obligations—of being a VCU alum. As part of the festivities, the graduates were offered free membership in the

Council. Last year an impressive number—106—took advantage of the opportunity.

"These partnerships with students and other organizations are important," says past Council president Gail Robinson. The Council should continue to focus on students, particularly on recruitment and retention. "While it is important to build an alumni base, it is also important to target the students. We must get them while they're here."

This past November, as part of the University's Founders Day celebration, the Council greeted VCU's new Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, Dr. Roderick McDavis, with a special reception. For many, this event was an introduction to the Council as well. "I'm delighted by this welcome," said McDavis, "and it's wonderful to see this event bringing VCU students, faculty, staff and alumni together."

Working with University divisions is important, but the Council's essential partners are alumni. For the Council to continue its mission, it must continue to recruit new members. It has added almost 100 new members in the past year, thanks to the efforts of Council leadership, its special programs and partnerships. The Council's growing website and a new online newsletter are spreading the word and increasing membership.

New Council member **Nina Goodwyn '93BS/MC** says, "I am always impressed by the exciting news about my alma mater—in clear view from my office windows in downtown Richmond. I believe the AAAC will give me an opportunity to become more involved with VCU students, faculty and other alumni. It's fulfilling to learn more about a place that I consider my second home."

in on the possible. He has implemented primary health care policy, program expansion, and technical assistance for more than 2,000 neighborhood sites nation wide. "I try to keep measurable outcomes in sight. It is better to make progress than to worry about perfection."

Accepting his Alumni Star award in 1995, Crump thanked "the people who taught me what primary care is all about. I want to thank the homeless for teaching me what it's like to live without a place to store food or a way to clean up. I want to thank the migrant workers for teaching me about modern-day slavery."

He challenged his fellow alumni and VCU faculty then to think about diversity. "Not just cultural but socio-economic diversity. National trends are against welfare, against Medicaid, opposed to immigrants. Health and social disparities may get worse if we don't start to turn things around."

Regan Crump is currently a leader in the national Campaign for 100 % Access and 0 Disparities. He and his colleagues partner with a host of national and state organizations to support this movement, growing community by community. The goal is to bring health care to everyone and eliminate measurable differences in health status outcomes based on race, culture and socio-economic status.



Crump urges alumni, "Be an advocate. Speak up for the underserved."

When J.B. Bryan Talks ...

J.B. Bryan '92MS/MC is fluent in the language of money. Only eight years after VCU graduation, Bryan heads her own investment firm with offices in Richmond and D.C., serves on the board of the Greater Richmond Chamber of Commerce, and teaches at Virginia Union University's Sydney Lewis School of Business. She offers thorough, plainspoken business

advice as the financial analyst for WRIC-Channel 8, and on the Bryan Business Report on WSOJ-FM.

Profiled by the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* in 1998, Bryan said, "I always wanted to study communications and be on television, but my father encouraged me to study business." She took his advice, earning a double major in finance and accounting at the School of Commerce at the University of Virginia.

AFRICAN AMERICAN ALUMNI ACT

For Us, By Us

The VCU African American Alumni Council is blossoming, flourishing and maturing before our eyes as it takes its rightful place among the University's most productive support groups. Of predominately white universities in Virginia, VCU boasts the largest African-American student body. The Council's bridge-building to these students carries benefits not only to them, but to all of us.

We are proud of our first 10 years, and look forward to building our students, our alumni and the University even more in the next ten. We need all alumni, but especially African-American alumni, to support the Council and African-American students. If not us, then who?

To join the African American Alumni Council, use the form on page 40 or check the website. Part of the dues from every membership goes to the scholarship fund, so by simply joining the Council you support students. For information about Council activities and scholarships, call **Larry Powell '85BS/MC** at (804) 828-2586, email at aaac@vcu.edu or check website: http://www.alumni.vcu.edu/AAAC/aa_alumni_council.html

Linnie Carter "grew up at VCU," first as a student and then for six years as PR specialist for VCU Libraries before becoming community affairs coordinator for the Richmond Metropolitan Authority. Her term as president of the VCU African American Alumni Council begins July 1, 2000.

Thelma Bland '88MS(G)/AH former Commissioner of Virginia's Department for the Aging * **Jeannette Drake '76 MSW '91MFA/H&S** poet and artist * **Lisa Edwards-Burrs '83BM** international opera singer * **Rex Ellis '74BFA** curator and chair of American cultural history at the Smithsonian Museum * **Daniel Gill '71BS/B** former director of the office of minority business for the U.S. Secretary of Defense * **Cleve Francis '73MD** cardiologist and country singer * **Ben Hamlin '82BS/MC** sportscaster, Jefferson Pilot Broadcasting * **Dr. Grace Harris '60MSW** VCU provost and academic vice president 1992-99, acting VCU president Summer, 1995 * **Dr. Jean Harris '55MD** retired president, Ramey Medical Foundation, community health activist, Minnesota * **Anita Josey-Herring '82BA/H&S** Superior Court judge, District of Columbia * **Kevin Johnson '86BS/B** manages information technology contracts for Seagram, Polygram Records, and Universal Studios * **W. Randolph Johnson '89BS/H&S** Richmond City Council, Hanover County Zoning Inspector * **Agymah Kamau '92MFA/H&S** novelist Pictures of a Dying Man, others * **Michelle Mitchell '84BS/H&S** Sheriff, City of Richmond * **Dawn Alston Paige '87BS/MC** financial expert and writer, Black Enterprise magazine and elsewhere * **DrPH Ron Peters '91BS(HA) '94MS(G)/AH** faculty associate, University of Texas School of Public Health; principal investigator of the Houston Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring Program, funded by National Institute of Justice * **Robert Pratt '80BA/H&S** associate professor of history at University of Georgia, The Color of their Skin: Education and Race in Virginia, other books and papers * **Jay Sharpe '90BFA** jewelry designer to stars like Lauryn Hill, Deborah Cox * **Sabrina Squire '76BS/H&S** Richmond news anchor and community leader *

A list like this can't possibly be complete. Write and tell us who else should be here.

In 1992, Bryan went to work for Wheat First Butcher Singer and became a broker. She soon set off to build her own firm, using her own savings and credit cards, and applying her Wheat First experience. Now J.B. Bryan (the firm) specializes in asset management and protection services.

"I've never had a job with a salary," she said. "I always had commission-based jobs. My income has always been based on my performance." She credits her confidence to her belief. "I have so much faith," she said. "You can't do your best work with fear in your heart"

A self-described workaholic, Bryan explains, "This is my only responsibility, to make my clients happy. It's my baby," she continues. "I have to burp it, rock it, get up in the middle of the night to check on it, embrace it and let it know I love it." Although her firm is relatively new, she has more than 400 clients and manages more than \$10 million. Her average client has \$100,000 in assets under management, but Bryan is willing to work with a minimum investment of \$1,000.

"I hate turning people away. I try to keep our minimum investment low so everyone can take advantage of professional financial assistance." Her clients praise her as hardworking, dedicated and approachable. To further help her community, Bryan also offers finan-

cial seminars, where she explains investments and finances with welcome lucidity and clarity. When J.B. Bryan talks, people don't just listen, they understand.

The community recognizes her contributions. Virginia Heroes, Inc. named Bryan a Virginia Hero, and the Metropolitan Business and Professional Woman's Club honored her as Outstanding Woman of the Year. VCU's African American Alumni Council named her Outstanding Alumna for 2000.

"I'm committed to educating people," Bryan says, and she obviously enjoys unveiling the mysteries of finance. "My goal is to help a lot of people make a lot of money and have a lot of fun. I can't imagine doing anything else."

Jeff Landon '85BA/H&S edited and expanded these profiles. He's writing a novel, and riding herd on his daughters, Maggie, 9, and Emma 5.

